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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PHNOM PENH 000839

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; GENEVA FOR RMA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: CAMBODIAN ROYALIST PARTY IN TURMOIL -- BUT  
STAGGERS ON

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Margaret B. McKean, Reason: 1.5 (b) and  
(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Conversations with FUNCINPEC royal family members and loyalists suggest that some royals, including FUNCINPEC leader Prince Norodom Ranariddh, are discussing the possibility of forming a new political party. Former Co-Minister of Interior Prince Norodom Sirivudh and Deputy PM Lu Lay Sreng, however, say such talk is premature. Sirivudh notes that FUNCINPEC has been hijacked by the CPP, and refers to the party as "HUNSENPEC." King father Norodom Sihanouk will return before the end of May, according to Prince Sisowath Thomico. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Hun Sen has dismissed more FUNCINPEC officials, which Sirivudh claims is aimed more at removing possible obstacles to the Cambodia-Vietnam border agreement than the political dismantlement of FUNCINPEC within the coalition government. End Summary.

A New FUNCINPEC?  
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¶2. (C) Serei Kosal, a senior FUNCINPEC official, told the Embassy in late April that upon his return to Cambodia in May, Prince Norodom Ranariddh will assess the functioning of FUNCINPEC's permanent committee, Secretary General Nhek Bun Chhay's leadership, and FUNCINPEC party cadre satisfaction with the party and its handling of recent political developments. Depending on Ranariddh's findings, the FUNCINPEC leader may insist on a reorganization of the party.

If FUNCINPEC Secretary General Nhek Bun Chhay disagrees, Serei Kosal said that Ranariddh may try to form a new party. Kosal told us that based on FUNCINPEC's statutes, the President of the party has the right to dissolve the party. Kosal added that he and other FUNCINPEC officials suspect that Nhek Bun Chhay is leading the party in the wrong direction according to instructions from the CPP. Kosal said that Ranariddh would include Princess Norodom Vacheara and Prince Norodom Chakrapong in important roles in any new royalist party, but Prince Norodom Sirivudh would likely be ignored as he had been problematic while serving in the government. FUNCINPEC DPM Lu Lay Sreng told us Serei Kosal was sending up a trial balloon on the idea of a new party, but that the idea was premature.

¶3. (C) According to Serei Kosal, members of the royal family advocating a new royalist party would like to see FUNCINPEC returned to the leadership of its original founder, the retired King Norodom Sihanouk. However, Prince Sisowath Thomico, secretary to former King Sihanouk, told us on April 26 that Sihanouk would not become involved in party politics again in Cambodia. Thomico noted that in order to maintain his role as a figure of national reconciliation, it is important that the former king remain above the political

fray -- no matter how much it affects his own party or his family. Thomico added that Sihanouk has launched three political movements -- and been betrayed by followers in each one of his endeavors. The latest political party involving Sihanouk was the formation of FUNCINPEC, and Thomico said the former king blames his son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, for betraying the party's ideals and his father wishes in governing the party.

14. (U) Thomico said that Sihanouk would return to Cambodia before the end of May, and that he had accompanied the king father to North Korea for a recent visit. While in North Korea, Thomico assisted Sihanouk in two film projects: a documentary about North Korea that was shown on Cambodian television, and a twelve-minute sketch based on an interview with Princess Vacheara, entitled, "Who Does Not Have a Mistress?" The short film is a rebuttal to the Prime Minister's attack on FUNCINPEC officials for having mistresses, said Thomico, who considers extramarital affairs a normal part of Cambodian society and not the exclusive weakness of FUNCINPEC members.

#### Sirivudh's Take on FUNCINPEC's Reversal of Fortune

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15. (C) Prince Norodom Sirivudh, former Co-Minister of Defense and ex-Secretary General of FUNCINPEC, met with Charge and A/DCM on May 2, and outlined the five demands of Hun Sen to Prince Ranariddh in the lead up to the ousting of FUNCINPEC from the coalition government. First, Hun Sen demanded that Sirivudh be removed from the government as well as any leading role within FUNCINPEC. Second, the PM insisted that Ranariddh's young mistress leave Cambodia. Third, Hun Sen threatened Ranariddh, saying that the 50 plus

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one formula meant the FUNCINPEC leader could be removed as President of the National Assembly at any time; thus, Ranariddh resigned rather than face the embarrassment of possible removal. Fourth, Nhek Bun Chhay should be Secretary General of FUNCINPEC -- no one else, according to the PM. And finally, Ranariddh must return to Cambodia without his mistress. Sirivudh said that he advised Ranariddh to call Hun Sen's bluff on the Prince's possible removal from the National Assembly, saying that Cambodians would take to the streets if the PM tried to oust Ranariddh. Ranariddh, he continued, buckled under the prospect of being voted out of the National Assembly and decided to resign rather than face humiliation in the future.

16. (C) Sirivudh said that the Prime Minister's attack on FUNCINPEC is aimed at quietly removing people who might stand in the way of the border demarcation between Cambodia and Vietnam, now that the border agreement has been ratified by King Sihamoni and the two countries are preparing to put into place the border posts. Hun Sen wants to ensure that FUNCINPEC officials from any provinces along the border are removed over time, and the other FUNCINPEC firings amidst charges of mistresses, corruption, and incompetence are merely a smokescreen to mask the real CPP objective. Sirivudh noted that from a purely practical matter, it made managerial and financial sense to remove excess government officials whose duties were duplicated as a result of the coalition government. In that sense, he agrees with Hun Sen -- although in his position as a FUNCINPEC loyalist, Sirivudh said he must publicly object. The CPP attacks on the royal family members within FUNCINPEC and attempts to hijack the party under Nhek Bun Chhay are consistent with Hun Sen's desire to marginalize the monarchy from any role in Cambodian politics. Sirivudh quipped that FUNCINPEC has become so aligned with the CPP that he refers to the party as "HUNSENPEC." He believes that the PM will ensure FUNCINPEC's survival (albeit on a short leash) in order to create problems for Sam Rainsy and possibly Kem Sokha. Sirivudh lamented the inability of Cambodia's democratic politicians to align themselves against the CPP. He added that his heart

remains with the "Alliance of Democrats" coalition of FUNCINPEC and the opposition Sam Rainsy Party -- a coalition which broke apart in 2004. (Note: While there is clearly considerable truth in Sirivudh's rendition, he also was spinning the story to depict himself as the aggrieved democrat. In fact, the use of the term HUNSENPEC long predates our discussion and first came into vogue during the 2003 electoral campaign when the party was seen as a Hun Sen puppet. End Note.)

¶7. (C) The way forward out of the current mess for FUNCINPEC is not clear, said Sirivudh, who offered no vision for attracting new voters to the party of injecting a new life into the party's appeal to the nostalgia of former times. He noted that there has been discussion among royal family members of a new FUNCINPEC, but like DPM Lu Lay Sreng -- believes that the idea is premature. In the meantime, FUNCINPEC officials continue to be removed from government posts. The latest purge has been FUNCINPEC deputy governors, all of whom have been removed from their positions by FUNCINPEC Secretary General Nhek Bun Chhay.

COMMENT

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¶8. (C) Cambodia's royal family is a tragedy, comedy and melodrama all rolled into one that could have provided grist for at least a half dozen Shakespeare plays. In addition to the king father's return in May, Prince Ranariddh and Princess Vacheara are also expected to come back to the country from France. FUNCINPEC internal party politics should once again take center stage and provide some political theater for fans of the royal family. What is noteworthy, however, is that none of FUNCINPEC's senior officials has a clear idea of how to return the party to its former popularity among voters nor outmaneuver the CPP in its attempts to undermine the royalists. End Comment.

STORELLA